

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

January 23, 2024

The Honorable Teri L. Donaldson
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Inspector General Donaldson:

We request that the Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiate a review of the internal management controls regarding travel by Department of Energy (DOE) employees and related expense reimbursements. DOE has produced documents in response to a Committee request¹ containing 54 expense vouchers related to lodging and travel.² The expense vouchers reviewed by the Committee contain numerous anomalies, some without required justifications for policy deviations, that could indicate a higher risk of waste, fraud, and abuse of government resources. Collectively, they signal a potential failure to adhere to best practices related to government accounting standards intended to ensure compliance with the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR).³ In light of these concerns, we request that your office initiate a broader review of DOE's internal controls related to travel and expenses.

Documents produced to the Committee by DOE contain examples of staff lodging above per diem rates,⁴ travel expenses not included on the original authorization,⁵ and the use of government issued purchase cards potentially inconsistent with DOE policy.⁶ In addition, some comment boxes required for staff to justify a potential policy deviation were left empty.⁷ In one instance, a traveler's justification was redacted by DOE before production to the Committee.⁸ Questions also exist regarding the policy justifications for staff travel itineraries. For example, DOE paid for the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Sustainable Transportation and Fuels, to fly from Milan, Italy to Charlotte, North Carolina to participate in a roundtable on electric vehicles

¹ Letter from James Comer, Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight & Accountability, et. al to Jennifer Granholm, Secretary, U.S. Dep't of Energy (Sept. 26, 2023).

² See Enclosed Expense Vouchers.

³ See 41 C.F.R. §§ 300-1 et seq.

⁴ See e.g. *supra*, n.2 at VCH42985 (0AFLJW), VCH422955 (0AFLZQ), VCH422268 (0AFM8T).

⁵ *Id.* at VCH421799 (0AFLTD), VCH422486 (0AFLQV), VCH423000 (0AFLM0).

⁶ *Id.* at VCH42292-1 (0AFD29), VCH422397 (0AFKRQ), VCH423387-1 (0AFLKF).

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.* at VCH422492 (0AFL3S).

and virtual powerplants.⁹ It is unclear what DOE business occurred in Milan, Italy requiring DOE to justify international travel in this manner.

In recent years, DOE OIG found that a DOE official received reimbursement overpayments in connection with travel expenses, and made recommendations to DOE management related to recouping those overpayments and ensuring 100 percent review of claims submitted by certain high level officials.¹⁰ The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) OIG recently completed an investigation revealing how one official exploited lax internal controls at that agency to indulge in luxurious travel and expense reimbursements.¹¹ Given the numerous anomalies identified in the documents produced to the Committee by DOE, we believe there is a need for a broader review of DOE compliance with its policies and relevant regulations related to travel expenses designed to guard against fraud, waste, and misuse of government resources.

We ask that your review of DOE travel authorization and expense reimbursement processes include—along with any other relevant issues you find appropriate—compliance with internal controls for lodging and travel expenses, including but not limited to the following:

1. DOE travel authorizations;
2. DOE traveler justifications;
3. DOE lodging and travel expenses in excess of the authorized per diem amount;
4. Appropriate use of government-issued purchase cards; and
5. International travel by DOE officials.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X.

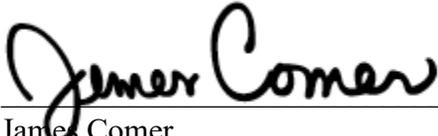
⁹ *Id.* at VCH422330 (0AFL1M).

¹⁰ Dep’t of Energy Office of Inspector General, *Allegations Regarding Management Conduct within the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity* (December 2021) (DOE-OIG-22-18).

¹¹ See EPA Office of Inspector General, *Report of Investigation Katherine A. Lemos, Former Chairperson and Chief Exec. Officer, U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board* (June 2023) (23-N-0020).

The Honorable Teri L. Donaldson
January 23, 2024
Page 3 of 3

Sincerely,



James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Accountability



Pat Fallon
Chairman
Subcommittee on Economic Growth,
Energy Policy, and Regulatory
Affairs

cc: The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

The Honorable Cori Bush, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs

The Honorable Jennifer Granholm, Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy

Enclosure